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CLIFFORD SYMPOSIUM EXAMINES AI'S IMPACT BEYOND HYPE AND FEAR

COURTESY PHOTO/ BRETT SIMISON

Provost Michelle McCauley moderates a faculty panel with Thor Sawin, Roberto Lint Sagarena, Michael Linderman, German Reyes, and Allison Stanger.

By TING CUI
Business Director

On Sept. 18–19, students, faculty, scholars and community members gathered for "AI Unboxed: Moving Beyond Hype and Fear" to explore the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The Symposium offered 11 events over two days, spanning topics including climate change, higher education, computer science, art, international security and the future of work in light of rapid developments in the world of AI. Organizers aimed to move past utopian promises and dystopian dread, instead carving out a middle space for nuance, dialogue and critical inquiry.

AI and Climate

The Symposium began with a session focused on AI's energy demands. Climate Action Fellow Vee Syengo '25.5 explained how every ChatGPT query triggers billions of calculations in server warehouses — called data centers — that run like "non-stop marathons," consuming massive amounts of electricity for cooling.

Visiting professor from Duke University's Nicholas Institute, Tim Profeta, warned that demand for U.S. data centers could grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 33% through 2030, doubling their share of national power consumption from 4% to 8%.

Yet, Profeta also suggested that AI's high demand and hyperscaling might accelerate clean power adoption as tech giants promise to invest billions in geothermal, nuclear and storage technologies. Whether AI becomes a climate liability will depend on how its resource demands are managed and how quickly sustainable systems can be brought online.

President Baucom and Meghan O'Rourke on AI

For the Symposium's official opening session, college President Ian Baucom sat down

Continued on Page 3

Public Safety reinstates crackdown on parking violations

HUGO ZHANG/ THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

The Public Safety office, where the department that issues student parking tickets is housed.

By HUGO ZHANG
News Editor

In a Sept. 5 email, Associate Vice President for Safety Demitria Kirby and Dean of Students Joe Russell reminded students that parking on campus is "a privilege, not a right," listing the college's escalating accountability pathway to crack down on parking violations this year.

Measures range from tickets with $25-$100 fines to financial holds on students' accounts and prevention of participation in course registration and housing selection. In the first few weeks of school, students have already noticed Public Safety's stricter ticketing action.

This announcement follows calls for harsher policies last spring after faculty expressed frustration over limited parking availability and facilities encountered problems snow plowing roads due to parking violations. The complaints led the administration to consider preventing students from graduating unless they paid all of their parking fines.

Department of Public Safety Lieutenant Rick Whitney told The Campus that this semester's enforcement may look different in certain respects, one being the reintroduction of towing, which did not occur last year. While students may perceive these policies as new, he emphasized that they are not.

"This is not a change in policy, but a return to a necessary process that was taking place routinely several years ago," Whitney wrote in an email to The Campus. "We try to improve compliance through communication directly to students by phone/e-mail when we are able, issuance of warnings or tickets, and ultimately having the vehicle removed at the owner's expense."

Enforcement focuses on parking violations in high priority and restricted locations on campus, notably along College

Continued on Page 2

Armstrong Library closure poses challenges for librarians

MADELEINE KAPTEIN/ THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

The basement floor of BiHall formerly housed the Armstrong Science Library collections. Renovations over the summer transformed it into a study and tutoring space.

By KAI ARROWOOD
Contributing Writer

As the Armstrong Science Library in BiHall closed last fall, the Quantitative Center (Q-Center) was implemented in its former space, welcoming STEM students to a collaborative study spot. Meanwhile, the project of relocating Armstrong's collections presented difficulties for librarians, a challenge that may resurface when items from the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey (MIIS) will have move to Middlebury's campus after its closure.

The renovation was a heavy lift for library staff, according to Special Collections Outreach Specialist Mikaela Taylor, who wrote an article about Armstrong's legacy. Armstrong originally housed 100,000 volumes, including maps and government documents, though that number had been reduced to 40,000 by the start of renovations. From fall 2024 to Jan. 2025, librarians weighed what to keep and what to get rid of while facing staff shortages.

With the help of faculty, they

Continued on Page 2

DINING REFERRAL BONUS PROGRAM AIMS TO AID UNDERSTAFFING

JUNE SU/ THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

A staff member working in Proctor Dining Hall, which continues to face understaffing.

By JONATHAN EATON
Staff Writer

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, persistent staffing shortages have strained Middlebury's dining team. On Aug. 15, to combat recruitment challenges, the college's Human Resources Office launched a three week targeted pilot referral program, offering a $500 bonus in December to faculty and staff members if they helped to recruit a new dining employee.

Middlebury Human Resource Business Partner Kelly Dinan explained that a goal of the initiative was to get staff members invested in the hiring process.

"By offering a $500 bonus for successful referrals, we aimed to tap into the networks of our current employees and encourage their engagement in the recruitment process," Dinan wrote in an email to The Campus.

Since the program's launch, six full-time positions on the dining team have been filled, but none of the hires were referred through the program. Recruitment continues to be a challenge. This semester, there are eight vacant positions across the campus dining team, including cooks, prep cooks, and catering staff.

To qualify for the program, referrals had to apply by Sept. 7 and remain on staff through Dec. 12. Dining Services Manager at Ross Brent Simons told The Campus that the

Continued on Page 2

LOCAL

Buy Again Alley to relocate, making way for new antique store

By LILA DELUCA

Tour de Farms bike race raises money for ACORN

By ANNA DOUCET

▸ PAGE 4

OPINIONS

What The Campus can (and can't) do about AI

By MADELEINE KAPTEIN

I'm re-learning my mother tongue

by YUVRAJ SHAH

▸ PAGE 5

OPINIONS

AI revisited

By JOEY DISORBO

My takeaway from studying Classical Chinese in Beijing

By MURRAY HELZER

▸ PAGE 6

ARTS & CULTURE

Scenes from the performa-midd male contest

By DEVIN SANTIKARMA

My college diary

By CHRISTY LIANG

▸ PAGE 8

SPORTS

Tapped-in: Nordic skiers take to the roads on roller skis

By SIMON SCHMIEDER

Middlebury field hockey wins overtime thriller against Amherst

By HANNA FREUND

▸ PAGE 11

ARMSTRONG LIBRARY CLOSURE POSES CHALLENGES FOR LIBRARIANS

MADELEINE KAPTEIN/ THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

The outside of the Q-Center, where students come to meet tutors and data librarians for their STEM classes.

Continued from Page 1

reviewed how many times and how recently each item had circulated. If an item hadn't been checked out for over a decade, it went onto the chopping block. By the end of the delegation, only 20,000 books remained. Others were donated, recycled or sold to Better World Books, a third-party vendor and nonprofit.

Librarians had to take careful measures when it came to Armstrong's collection of government documents and maps. Strictly following government policies, government documents were either deaccessioned or moved to the Davis Family Library.

Preservation Manager Joseph Watson coordinated the sale of flat map cases to historical societies, libraries and nonprofits. Outdated topographical maps, many already digitized, were offered to academic departments, antique stores and the public. Those that could not be reused were recycled.

By Oct. 2024, circulation specialists determined that Davis' lower stacks could house much of the collection, and over two months, thousands of books were shifted to create space. The college hired a moving company to transport the collection, while Circulation Specialist Todd Sturtevant polished up the stacks, establishing a temporary holding place in the Davis lower level. Over the next year or two, Sturtevant will manage the integration of items in the Armstrong collection into Davis' main stacks.

The closure of MIIS and the transition of the Arabic, Italian and Portuguese Language Schools from Bennington to Middlebury's campus in summer 2027 will soon add more pressure to Davis' already limited capacity. The Armstrong transition came just as Davis had deaccessioned enough material to make space for new acquisitions, but accommodating additional collections will test a staff that numbers only 35.

The new Q-Center reflects a broader shift in STEM transitioning to digital research. Over the past decade, students and faculty have increasingly turned to databases for current journal articles instead of browsing Armstrong's physical collections.

"Science is more of a current-journal-article-type discipline," Director of Discovery and Access Services Terry Simpkins said. "Books that are 10, 15, 20 years or older have a limited use in a program like ours."

Libraries have been adapting to the digital age for decades. According to Simpkins, the majority of the library budget at Middlebury goes towards various paid journal subscriptions and databases, outnumbering spending on physical volumes by 10:1.

However, Watson believes that physical objects, especially those in Special Collections, will only increase in value as the world becomes digital.

"The idea of books as an object, not just something you can read, is almost like a work of art in itself," Watson said. "The way the book is bound, the way it was printed, those things will become more interesting to people."

The Q-Center now anchors the transition to increasing digital resources, supporting data-driven learning in place of Armstrong's shelves. They have 80 student tutors, five full-time general quantitative tutors and 10 assistants. Every day students fill the seats at its tables, attending faculty office hours, receiving academic support from their peers or finding time to focus in the former Armstrong reading room, which has remained a silent study space.

"Our faculty and staff benefit from help-seeking, and so do our students," Q-Center director Lauren Kodonowy wrote in an email to The Campus. "We aim to make the Q-Center 'the place to be' if you want to thrive as a learner, user, and teacher of quantitative skills."

Data librarians work with students on-site, while those in Davis work hard to ensure access to the latest research online. As the question of further digitization looms large, Middlebury's libraries will have to continue to adapt.

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Public Safety reinstates crackdown on parking violations

Continued from Page 1

Street, behind Proctor Dining Hall and the adjacent tennis courts, and along Old Chapel Road. Whitney shared that warnings and tickets remain important enforcement tools to educate students, despite the potential usage of towing when needed.

In past years, Public Safety offered a two-week grace period for parking at the start of each semester. That policy ended this fall.

"Traditionally, we've had about two weeks of a grace period for students and faculty and staff to park wherever," Smita Ruzicka, vice president for student affairs, said in a Sept. 5 faculty meeting on the Bread Loaf Campus before classes began. "We're not going to have that. Come Monday, parking will be fully enforced."

Murray Helzer '26 received a $50 ticket on the second day of the semester after parking in the faculty lot next to Atwater Commons, which sits adjacent to a student lot.

"It was quite annoying to get a ticket the second day of school," Helzer said in an interview with The Campus. "I was moving my stuff from my friend's place to my dorm. I was so surprised when I got the ticket, and I think that they were in too much of a hurry to start giving tickets."

Helzer acknowledged that he had parked in the wrong place, but hoped Public Safety could be more flexible and make the distinction between student and faculty lots clearer.

"I understand, since it was a faculty lot, but the distinction between faculty and student lots was quite misleading," Helzer said. "I wish [Public Safety] could give us more time to adapt to the new semester."

Francisco Téllez '26 is in his first semester of having a car on campus and said his parking options feel limited.

"I wouldn't say student parking locations are the best, and the actual availability is limited," Téllez said. "Once I came back to campus at 10 p.m., the student lots near Atwater Dining Hall, Atwater Commons and Ridgeline were all full, so I had to park at Mahaney across campus."

Téllez added that enforcement feels overly strict. He felt the administration was asking more of students than it provides in return.

"[The] requirements don't match the overall infrastructure the college has," Téllez said. "My friend forgot to apply for a permit. Of course, that was on him, but when he tried to apply online the website didn't work. He went to Public Safety's office, but no one was there."

In the spring, Associate Professor of History Maggie Clinton shared her frustrations with students constantly parking in faculty spots, preventing professors themselves from finding parking.

"The extra time we spend looking for parking and walking to our classrooms and offices is time that's not reflected in our salaries," she wrote to The Campus. "For years now, we've been asked to give five minutes here, five minutes there, to tasks that used to be addressed by other employees but now fall to us."

Whitney stated that the crackdown aims to create a more comfortable on-campus parking experience for all stakeholders, including students, faculty, staff and visitors. He mentioned that the administration has been struggling with students' compliance with parking policies for years.

"Middlebury operates as a residential campus, designed to encourage walking, biking, and use of local transit when needed. Driving between classes, residential buildings, and the dining hall undermines our environmental goals and the residential nature of the college," the Sept. 5 email from Kirby and Russell reads.

Editor's Note: Editor-in-Chief Madeleine Kaptein '25.5 contributed reporting to this article.

Dining Referral Program aims to aid understaffing

Proctor Hall
College Store
58 Hepburn Road

LUKE POWER/ THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

The front of Proctor Dining Hall, one of three dining halls. Administrators want to seee all three combine into one to alleviate staffing shortages.

Continued from Page 1

restrictions on dates left him frustrated.

"I had a recent hire who missed the kickoff of the program by a few weeks. They are ineligible for the bonus, which is very disappointing," Simons wrote in an email.

The pilot resembles a similar program launched in 2021 to help recruit more staff in facilities and dining services. However, the 2025 referral program does not include the additional sign-on bonus for new hires, according to Dinan.

"The majority of positions in Dining are difficult, physical jobs. Most employees are on their feet for the majority of their work day," Simons wrote in an email to The Campus. "The Ross Dining Hall team is still down one full time position, whose tasks are currently broken down amongst the remaining team members."

"While the number of referrals was lower than anticipated, I believe the program helped raise awareness of our job openings and allowed us to connect with candidates who might not have otherwise considered Middlebury," Dinan wrote.

Going forward, Simons suggested an extension of the bonus program, including increasing the sign-on and referral bonuses and expanding the referral eligibility beyond the college community to help address the current shortages.

In an email to The Campus, Executive Director of Food Service Operations Dan Detora explained that an ideal outcome for the dining infrastructure would be a single main dining hall, where the team would be concentrated.

"The ultimate goal would be to build one dining hall where we can centralize our team, but in the meantime, we are looking for better equipment and new technology to help streamline our tasks," Detora wrote.

CLIFFORD SYMPOSIUM EXAMINES AI'S IMPACT BEYOND HYPE AND FEAR

Continued from Page 1

COURTESY PHOTO/ BRETT SIMISON

President Ian Baucom speaks with Meghan O'Rourke about AI issues at the 2025 Clifford Symposium.

with acclaimed writer and his former student at Yale, Megan O'Rourke, to discuss what it means to read, write and teach in an age where machines can generate fluent text at will.

Baucom asked O'Rourke a series of questions that drew from her popular New York Times essay on AI. O'Rourke spoke about her "radicalizing" first encounter with ChatGPT, describing it as "a seductive cocktail of affirmation, perceptiveness, solicitousness and duplicity." Yet she also recognized AI's limitations: Its tendency toward "pastiche-like writing" and the false sense of mastery it provided, briefly convincing her she had accomplished what the machine had actually produced. Both she and Baucom voiced concern about the offloading of cognitive and emotional effort and the erosion of originality. Baucom explored these themes further by stressing the enduring values of slowness, uncertainty and struggle in authorship.

Baucom, drawing on Longinus' "On the Sublime," suggested that AI's constraints might highlight uniquely human ways of expression and thought.

He spoke of a "frontier intelligence" emerging in the relationship and boundaries between the human and the machine. The liberal arts education, he argued, becomes ever more vital in an AI world because it cultivates a distinctly human intelligence rooted in reflection and empathy that technology can't replicate.

For many, the conversation that unfolded became the Symposium's defining moment.

"I think it showed everyone that the president embodies liberal arts values," Brian Harris '26 said. "It was just impressive. And it really set up the stage of what this entire [symposium] is supposed to be."

Faculty Panel on AI

The faculty panel that followed revealed educators grappling with practical questions. The issue was how AI reshapes teaching and learning, and what it means to be educated in an AI world.

Associate Dean of Curriculum at the Language Schools Thor Sawin described a "sandwich approach," allowing AI use before and after class, but not during.

Professor of American Studies Roberto Lint Sagarena shared how his J-Term course on Worldbuilding incorporated prompt engineering. He emphasized that professors must first learn and understand these tools in order to teach them, or even to reject them meaningfully. Some faculty found AI useful for revealing blind spots in their teaching. Others spoke of creating "AI-free" spaces that prioritize learning over assessments.

Middlebury Distinguished Endowed Professor Allison Stanger took the opposite tack, calling for full integration of AI with ample footnotes and citations, pointing out that institutions like Harvard already provide paid AI tools to all students.

"I think we should just stop this theater of prohibition and instead embrace it, because we do not want to teach students to lie to us," Stanger said.

The conversation then turned to Assistant Professors of Economics Zara Contractor and German Reyes' new paper on Generative AI in Higher Education. Their survey from August found that while 82% of Middlebury students use AI academically, most weren't taking shortcuts. Instead, they described AI as a personal tutor, using LLMs for "augmentation," not "automation." The findings echoed this year's Zeitgeist 7.0, which showed that roughly 85% of the 1,026 student survey respondents said they use AI for their classes.

The panel's tension lay in designing pedagogy that neither bans nor blindly embraces AI, but instead teaches students to use it thoughtfully. The panel reaffirmed Middlebury's core teaching values: Keeping students engaged, explaining why assignments matter and the importance of play in meaningful education.

"If we can get students to fall in love with the end we're presenting for them, and teach them why we made the choices in our syllabus — and how AI can either help them reach those goals or steal from them — that helps naturally regulate how they use it," Sawin said.

Cycles of Hype and Fear

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The symposium's first night closed with a keynote from Melanie Mitchell, a leading AI researcher at the Santa Fe Institute. She traced AI's "tumultuous past," from dreams of conscious machines in the 1950s through cycles of hype and "AI winters." Each wave of innovation, from the early perceptron to the machine learning revolutions of the 2010s, carried both breakthroughs and limits. Today's moment, she argued, is both "astounding" and "terrifying" as systems capable of producing complex mathematical proofs can also mistake billboards for stop signs. Her charge to the audience was not only to ask what AI can achieve, but what it should achieve.

The second day opened with Wilson Hall reconfigured into roundtables for a packed day of discussion. Sessions ranged from international security to the future of the workforce. Salesforce co-founder Parker Harris '89 told students that AI's disruptive power surpasses even the iPhone, predicting major upheavals in entry-level jobs.

Harris' advice to students facing an AI-transformed job market was to "learn to learn."

"Learning to learn will help you retrain yourself as jobs change... Because getting the knowledge and getting the skills is not the problem — it's your skills to acquire those skills and to acquire that knowledge. And that's what we're teaching at Middlebury."

Lunch was served with an alumni panel discussing graduates' experience using AI in their careers and personal lives, followed by artist Laura Splan's exploration of human-AI coexistence and a gentle primer on language models by Assistant Professor of Computer Science Laura Biester.

The symposium concluded with a presentation by lawyer, professor Kay Firth-Butterfield, an AI expert and a 2024 TIME 100 Impact awardee. She spoke of AI's potential to cure disease, predict wildfires, and aid conservation, while also warning of its risks: Bias, hallucinations, surveillance, and a steep environmental cost.

"This intelligence and our own intelligence can be combined to really shape every stage of our lives," Firth-Butterfield told The Campus. "To co-author what future we want to hand to our children and beyond — and how that dovetails with stewardship of the only planet that we've got to live on."

The symposium ended with a structured dinner discussion where students and faculty reflected on what it means to coexist with AI at Middlebury. What began with climate anxieties closed with a call to define, more clearly than ever, what it means to be human.

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Tour de Farms bike race raises money for ACORN

By ANNA DOUCET
Contributing Writer

This past Saturday, Sept. 20, the Town of Middlebury hosted the Tour de Farms, an annual biking fundraiser for the Addison County Relocalization Network (ACORN), a non-profit that promotes the healthy growth of food and agriculture in the Champlain Valley.

The Tour de Farms is ACORN's biggest annual fundraiser. This past weekend marked its 17th year and was also the first time that Middlebury hosted the event. Starting and ending at the Middlebury Rec Field, the route spanned a record 37 miles, with stops at seven local farms. To participate, riders were asked to donate a minimum of $75 to ACORN in support of the local foodshed.

Despite setting a minimum donation, ACORN emphasizes that they never want cost to hinder anyone from participating. Their priority is to maximize community participation and are willing to support riders as needed.

Beyond raising money for ACORN, the Tour de Farms also offers local farms and food networks a chance to showcase their products. This year marked the first time Sunrise Orchards took part in the event, serving as one of the stops along the route.

"We all sample something from what we produce or something made with what we produce," Chris Hodges, the co-owner of Sunrise Orchards, said. Her farm sampled apples, honey, jam and goat cheese.

Hodges described the day as a success. Although Sunrise Orchards has been operating for 51 years, this is only their 5th year of offering a "pick your own apples" service. As a farm still relatively new to retail operations, the Tour de Farms provided a chance for them to connect with the community and promote their offerings.

"It's a great opportunity for people to come out to the farm who may or may not have been there before and to learn about where their food comes from," Hodges said. Especially following a summer of drought, the orchard was glad to have the support of the community.

People from across Addison County and beyond gathered to enjoy the early fall weather and to support local food production. Along the route riders made purchases that could be collected by farm vans and delivered to the finish line, ensuring participants were not limited based on the space on their bikes.

Vice President for the Middlebury Language Schools and Schools Abroad Derek Doucet participated in his first Tour de Farms this year.

"I love locally produced food, and I love to ride bikes," Doucet said, noting that this event was a great way to combine these two passions.

Doucet emphasized that the Tour de Farms is a fun and creative way to give publicity to local food networks.

"I think that local food is something that everyone can gather around in this community, and the Tour de Farms helps to promote agricultural sustainability which is a huge benefit for the community as a whole," Doucet said.

The community showed up in large numbers for the event, attracting 300-500 participants. Despite the crowds, ACORN ensured the safety of the event, sharing a list of safety guidelines to protect participants and spectators. Helmets were mandatory and bikes needed to be wide-tire mountain bikes, gravel grinders or road bikes in proper mechanical condition.

"The program was really well run," Hodges said. "There were plenty of volunteers scattered around the different stops, and the riders were awesome at managing each other."

Doucet echoed Hodge's sentiments. "There were course marshals at all the key intersections, and the route was generally very quiet and low-traffic," he said.

The event ran smoothly, and both farmers and participants were happy to be out supporting local farms. Hodges said she hopes even more people will join the event next year.

"We always love having new people come out," she said. "We're out here, it's beautiful, it's a great way to spend time at the orchard."

BUY AGAIN ALLEY TO RELOCATE, MAKING WAY FOR NEW ANTIQUE STORE

By LILA DELUCA
Contributing Writer

Buy Again Alley, a nonprofit thrift store located in downtown Middlebury, has lost their lease after six years based at 60 Main Street. The owners of the building, who gave the business only 30 days notice before requiring it to vacate the building, intend to open an antique shop there in the coming months, according to Buy Again Alley employee Jakob Loven.

The store will remain open at their current location until this coming Saturday, Sept. 27. It has stopped accepting donations and is hosting multiple sales as it prepares to move. It is in the process of negotiations on a lease for a new space in downtown Middlebury, according to Jeanette Gyukeri, executive director of Buy Again Alley. Gyukeri declined to name the location of the new spot since the agreement is not yet final, but said that it is a 5-10 minute walk from the business' current Main Street location. If the lease is signed, the shop will re-open there in late October.

Gyukeri said that remaining closed throughout most of October will present a challenge for the non-profit's business.

"October for us is a very big month sales wise. It gets a lot of engagement with the college, with the multitudes of parties that happen there, and students come in, so we are sad to not have retail space during that window," Gyukeri said.

Despite Buy Again Alley's temporary lack of a home base, the business will still be in operation through pop-up events at Midd Pride, Parent's Weekend, and the Middlebury Fall Festival and Car Show, where it will sell Halloween costumes and accessories.

This upcoming year will mark Buy Again Alley's 10th year of business. With a wealthy base of local donors and a successful summer of sales, Gyukeri is confident it will continue to thrive.

"We had a moment this summer where it was just clicking, something was clicking with the community," Gyekeri said. "While this space may not be available to us anymore, we have built a thing that is so easily movable to another space that it was never a thought that we wouldn't attempt to relocate."

BUY AGAIN ALLEY
ATWOOD

KATRINA SCHWARZ/ THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS
Rt. 116 experienced significant damage due to summer flash flooding.

Buy Again Alley is a nonprofit business whose mission is to support local teenagers, college students and young adults. They give out scholarships to Middlebury High School graduates pursuing a non-traditional path after high school. By funding individuals pursuing various futures such as trade school, certification, internships and gap-year travel, it seeks to reinvest money back into the youth of Addison County in order to financially support their goals.

"We want to help young people where they are and help them advance in ways that are deemed as non-traditional," Gyukari said.

Aside from the thrift shop's prominent role in the local community, college students enjoy the shop and the convenience it provides for students those to purchase everything from Halloween costumes to dorm room decor at affordable prices.

Maggie Kim '28 spoke highly of her many shopping trips to the thrift store as a regular customer.

"I have only great experiences at Buy Again Alley. I've been able to find clothes, jewelry, and even decor there, all at affordable prices. The people that work there are so kind and are always welcoming when I go," Kim said.

Another student commented on the variety of items Buy Again Alley sells.

"Buy Again Alley is such a fun place to walk into. In my experience, you never know what you will find but you can always count on finding something cool," Lillian Showater '29 said.

While students and individuals strolling in town may no longer be able to conveniently stop into the Main Street storefront after they close this Saturday, the information on their new location will be available shortly on their social media pages, according to Gyekeri.

Editor's Note: Editor-in-Chief Madeleine Kaptein '25.5 contributed reporting to this article.

22ND ANNUAL TAM TREK TAKES TO THE TRAIL

By KATRINA SCHWARZ
Senior Local Editor

This past Sunday, Sept. 21, the Middlebury Area Land Trust (MALT) hosted its 22nd annual Trail Around Middlebury (TAM) Trek to raise money and awareness for their organization. The TAM Trek, which spans a 19-mile course, aimed to include various levels of participants by offering a 10k run, a 5k run, and a two-mile family "fun run" in addition to the full-length race.

The Trek starts and ends in Wright Park, where participants could listen to live music, win local raffle prizes and share a meal after admiring the pastures, forests and local neighborhoods along the course route. While on the path, runners crossed two MALT-built suspension bridges which both span waterfalls and gorges.

Henry Chien '26 ran the full 19 miles. "My goal is to eventually do a marathon, so the TAM Trek was a good step after a half marathon. I felt like the running was really a mental game, but running with people I knew 100% made it easier," he said.

Executive Director of MALT Kevin Fox described the TAM Trek's history in an email to The Campus. The event originally started as community walks along the trail, featuring tree and plant identification activities. The event then gradually shifted into a bike ride, and finally into the running race hosted by MALT today.

"At first it wasn't even timed, but the main idea was always about celebrating the TAM as a community treasure and drawing people outside to enjoy it together," Fox wrote.

Before joining MALT in July 2025, Fox previously served as a Foreign Service Officer for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), most recently spearheading a climate and biodiversity conservation portfolio across the Amazon rainforest.

"What drew me to MALT is its community-centered approach—a chance to put global lessons into practice here at home and strengthen local stewardship of the land," Fox wrote.

MALT works to conserve land and provide environmental education, in addition to maintaining the TAM, which is utilized by more than 10,000 locals and students every year. MALT has helped to conserve 3,500 acres of farm, forest and wildlife habitat while simultaneously investing in outdoor education and climate resilience for youth.

Although the TAM Trek aims to gather members of the Middlebury community, it also serves a fundraising purpose. The race's registration fees and raffle help to raise part of the $100,000 needed to maintain the TAM each year. Community donations to MALT and MALT membership fees also work to generate the budget for the trail's upkeep.

Fox emphasized that Middlebury students can become involved with the organization in a variety of ways.

"For Middlebury students, MALT offers a unique way to connect with this place—whether by walking the TAM, volunteering on trail projects, or joining community events like the TAM Trek," he wrote. "Every hour and every dollar invested in MALT directly supports recreation, conservation, and quality of life in Middlebury, today and for future generations."

Fox's enthusiasm for the college's connection to MALT is echoed by members of Middlebury's student body.

"The TAM is an integral part of the Middlebury experience. While you may venture out solo, it is a great way to connect with the greater, non-human community. For many recreational runners, including myself, the TAM is a place of serenity," Sophia Galuppo '26.5 said.

She reflected on how the TAM can provide a tool to stay present and the general respite that can be found on the trail.

"The nature of the TAM forces you to both literally and metaphorically slow down. As you attempt to avoid misstepping into a puddle or mud or loose tree root, you're forced to be in the moment rather than going through the motions of hustle culture," Galuppo said.

Fox views MALT as a natural partner for Middlebury students and faculty who care about sustainability, community engagement, and conservation. He recently met with college President Ian Baucom to discuss opportunities for the organization and the college to partner in the future.

Fox believes that there is enormous potential for the two entities to collaborate further and advance inclusive approaches to sustainability, conservation, and field-based environmental education across Vermont.

Editor's Note: Managing Editor Mandy Berghela '26 contributed in writing this article.

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COURTESY PHOTOS/ CALEB KENNA

I'M RE-LEARNING MY MOTHER TONGUE

Op-Ed

Yuvraj Shah *is a member of the class of 2026 and the Senior Opinions Editor.*

In February 2024, I wrote an op-ed for The Campus titled 'I'm forgetting my mother tongue.' Within one day of publishing, I was contacted by over 30 students who grew up and live outside of the regions where their mother tongue is spoken. Together, we mourned the loss of our linguistic heritage. Last November, my maternal grandfather passed away. He was the first Oshwal justice in Kenyan history. When I sat down to write part of his obituary, I realized I had never asked him about his life. Everything I knew about him was from older members of my family. It was then when I recognized the necessity of my situation. I believe globalization is increasing the growth of multi-cultural communities, and it is allowing people to examine a world with more equity and equality. But it should not come at the expense of cultural sovereignty. It is up to the individual to make sure their culture is not forgotten.

Kenya's Indian population has been decreasing by around 1.8% yearly since 1970. With just around 85,000 Kenyans of Indian origin remaining in Kenya today, we are at risk of losing the histories and stories of a community which numbered over 600,000 in the 1960s, and one which was instrumental in the nation-building of one of Africa's most populous countries.

I was very lucky to benefit directly from a form of globalization: a change in British immigration law. In 2002, Kenyan Asians were given the right to claim full British citizenship. However, this change in law, while an affirmation of the historic role the British state had in the protection of the Kenyan Asians, also resulted in a continued exodus out of Kenya. Many young people, including myself, chose to use our passports and leave Kenya in search of better economic opportunities. This continued exodus has been at the heart of the loss of cultural sovereignty.

TANGANYIKA RAILWAYS
301

The Middlebury Campus / Yuvraj Shah

Nairobi's Railway Museum. Some 70,000 Indians moved to East Africa as indentured laborers in the 1900s as railway builders.

I have to preface this by saying that Kenyan Asians are not at risk of losing their culture from external forces. In fact, we are one of the most privileged demographics in Africa, with many of us having access to both the Kenyan and British economies. Many people are not so fortunate and are losing access to their heritage and culture as a result of violent imperialism. Instead, Kenyan Asians are at risk of losing our culture as a result of our own apathy towards history.

As more and more people migrate and settle in countries outside of their own, it is up to individuals to record their histories. This requires the individual to commit time, effort and in many cases even finances. However, I believe we are at a race against time. Broader political movements are calling for the silencing of history. Whether that is through deportation, changing textbooks, or vilifying people who challenge accepted narratives of history, it is up to the individual to record their family's and community's stories.

This does not require large academic projects, or vast academic resources. For many people, it can be a conversation with their grandparents or parents, one that can then be shared with children, nieces, nephews and more. What about language? I struggle with Gujarati, and find it very difficult to authentically engage with my grandparents. However, there are other ways to engage with cultural history, even without linguistic fluency: Through photos, letters and other memorabilia. It is important we act in earnest and begin to digitize our heritage before it is lost.

Looking at my wider community of Kenyan Asians, I notice a trend of tapping into our culture when it is convenient. Many Kenyan Asians proudly wear a bracelet with the Kenyan flag on their wrist, yet they cannot tell you about the East African Indian National Congress, nor the role their community played in the Kenyan independence movement of 1950. We know more about the American Civil War and the Spanish Inquisition than the stories of people in our own households.

Globalization presents many benefits to the future of humanity. It allows us to examine our problems together. Cultures and communities can share solutions and discuss equitable ways to proceed. However, we risk losing these benefits if we forget our cultural heritage. It is that very heritage which allows diverse communities to thrive as each individual participant brings their own identity to the fold. Forgetting our history risks bringing us back to the drawing board, where no one can draw on past experiences to look forward. I still haven't learnt Gujarati fluently. I likely never will. But I spent my summer talking to Kenyan Asians who are fluent in English, and asking them about our history. I hope to never stop.

NOTES FROM THE DESK: WHAT THE CAMPUS CAN (AND CAN'T) DO ABOUT AI

Op-Ed

Madeleine Kaptein *is a member of the class of 2025.5 and the Editor-in-Chief.*

ChatGPT was introduced to me in my sophomore year, the spring of 2023, by Professor of Writing and Rhetoric Hector Vila. We pasted our writing into the then-novel software, asked it for an improved version and reflected on what we liked about our work vs the robot's. I watched my essay about my complicated relationship to my family in the Netherlands transform into something decidedly less authentic. I closed the tab, assured that the technology could never replace good human writing.

In that same semester, I quietly nodded along at a Campus meeting when the executive team at the time set a ChatGPT policy for our newsroom. With some caveats, writers could use the tool in the reporting and journalistic process if they informed their editors. For producing the text of an article or editing, it was forbidden. While we still maintain these standards, over two years later I feel the need to recognize their limitations and add some transparency about how The Campus is navigating the rapidly changing landscape of research and writing.

For a long time after that initial semester of ChatGPT-craze, I tried to ignore generative artificial intelligence (AI) almost entirely. I tuned out my dentist's AI-induced skepticism when I told him I plan to pursue a career in journalism and shut my eyes to how much my peers were implementing the tool. The idea that the writing I spent hours on could theoretically be done in just a few seconds terrified me.

But when I stepped into my managing role on The Campus last fall, I adopted responsibility for the quality, accuracy and humanness not only of my own writing, but of approximately 20 pieces of others' work per week. That meant I had to stop turning away.

I have, and partially still, view The Campus as relatively safe from what I see as generative AI's many pitfalls: Some factual errors, limitations in original storytelling abilities and potential bias. Unlike large newsrooms that have struggled to handle AI, we report on a small campus and town community; it would be difficult for generative AI software to gather sufficient information for the kinds of articles we publish, many of which require quotations from interviews. Plus, no one is paid for the work they do for us, and participation is entirely voluntary. What incentive would students have to make a machine write for them?

I was also formerly confident that I would be able to tell if I encountered a submission written with ChatGPT or a similar device. But with the technology's mass adoption and sharpening capabilities, I can no longer be sure. That weighs on me.

Since the 2022-23 executive team set their AI policy, not one writer nor editor has ever notified us that they have used it. Yet according to a recent study conducted by Middlebury professors, over 80% of students here implement it to some degree for classwork, turning me skeptical that it has not touched Campus contributions. Last week, we enthusiastically welcomed members of the class of 2029 to start writing for us. They have had access to ChatGPT and similar tools since their sophomore year of high school and know how to use them better than I do. While I do not accuse them of generative AI use based on this fact alone, it is indisputable that they are more likely to implement it than previous classes.

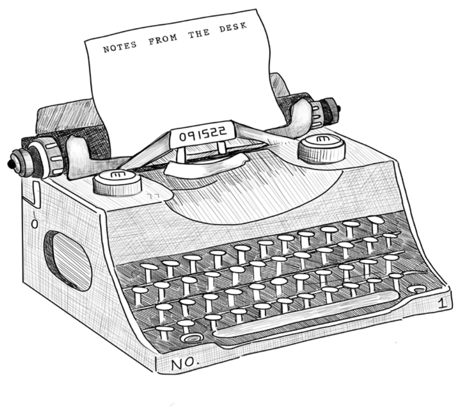
Luckily, there are aspects already enmeshed in The Campus' editorial process that limit the influence generative AI can have over what readers find in our final pages. We use Google Docs to write and edit, meaning that most of the time, we have access to writers' editing history. Each of our sections have teams of four or five editors that meet in-person to work on writers' pieces in "Suggestion Mode." These suggestions and comments are labeled with time stamps, guaranteeing that revisions are not copy-pasted from another window and revealing how quickly they were conducted. The executive team accepts or rejects editors' suggestions and adds in our own changes in "Editing Mode." Opinion works a little differently. We require opinion writers to accept and reject edits themselves and respond to all comments and questions, necessitating interaction and dialogue to bring their final piece to fruition.

Anyone who has written for The Campus knows that edits typically aren't light. This is part of our process for outputting the highest quality material possible and training our contributors.

While I reiterate that our policy remains the same as it was in 2023 — we must be notified if you use generative AI for any part of your reporting process and you may not use it to write — the thought of adding an editor's note to a story that AI contributed to the article pains me. After I tried to shut its existence out for so long, it would feel like surrender. Still, if transparency demands it, we will not hesitate.

I have also nervously wondered if our writers could unknowingly be citing information from the internet or directly from a person who has used AI to generate a typed response to email interview questions. We avoid conducting email interviews unless we need last-minute information that is vital to a story and could not be communicated over the phone, or if an essential source refuses a phone or in-person interview. We ask that community members contacted for an interview with The Campus make time for a conversation whenever possible.

I am well aware that these measures will only go so far and that the changes AI will bring are out of our control, and I am also aware that it is far from useless for those who know how to use it properly. But students should know that The Campus is a tool, too, and we want to be useful to anyone looking to practice their research and writing abilities. Readers should know that our purpose is to be an authentic resource to learn about the Middlebury community, compiled from hours of thoughtful, human work every week.



AI REVISITED

Joey Disobro *is a member of the class of 2025.5.*

Op-Ed

When I last wrote an op-ed about artificial intelligence (AI) in 2024, submissions created with the technology had sneakily won several art and photography contests. Now, it is consistently deceiving hundreds of thousands of internet users every day. Its content creation capabilities have improved so drastically that AI has officially breached into mainstream media with its use in post-production effects for Netflix's show "The Eternaut." It is safe to say that, up to this point, at least, AI progress has been exponential.

I'm writing now because if this continues the consequences are so seismic that to ignore them in earnest demonstrates a state of total obstinance, one that is so neglectful to the affairs of the human race it could be considered misanthropic. I can only forgive the monks, the surfers, and the children of the world for their ignorance; if you attend or teach at Middlebury College, you have long relinquished the privilege of being oblivious to that which so obviously and directly threatens not only academia but human activity as a whole.

It is not hard to imagine how far-reaching the consequences of a truly advanced Artificial Intelligence could be — for now, in true liberal arts flavor, let's just talk about capitalism.

We all know that AI is replacing jobs. This is not the only reason that the job market is feeling impenetrable, but soon it may be the preeminent one. I will simply repeat what I said a year ago, that "within the next decade it is reasonable to expect that there will not be a problem a human could solve that a computer could not." We should be preparing to face the reality that this may leave swathes of people with little to meaningfully contribute to society.

There appear to be two ways out of this. First, millions of Americans will have to swap collars from white to blue. This might be particularly traumatic for us liberal arts students who are paying exorbitant amounts to learn how to do exactly what is most in danger of substitution: Think. I hope we can all figure out how to hold a wrench.

The other option is a Universal Basic Income (UBI). How the U.S. will afford an acceptable UBI for hundreds of millions of Americans remains to be seen; If we print that money, we will violently debase our dollar, and as the de facto world reserve currency the consequences may be unforgiving. Furthermore, on its own, that stimulus would be immediately priced into consumer costs (meaning: it goes to the rich). One could make the point that the extent of federal price controls necessary to prevent this from happening would spell out the end of capitalism anyway.

But AI poses larger threats (or opportunities) to capitalism in how it will affect the marketplace. Consider this analogy

Imagine a local chess club. Once a month, chess enthusiasts get together to play each other in a tournament. There are some underdog wins, but in general, the better players usually prevail. One day, every member of the club comes to the tournament with a new app, a "pocket grandmaster", that tells them the best move to make every time (mind you, there's no rules against this, since nobody thought this would happen). Someone will still win the tournament, but it is fair to say that the players themselves no longer have an impact on that outcome.

To reduce capitalism to a chess match is highly reductive, ignoring the systemic forces at play that often dictate its winners and losers. But the point is that the "players" in capitalism are companies who will utilize their "pocket grandmaster" the moment it becomes possible for them to do so.

My view is that with the advent of universally accessible, super-intelligent AI systems, the resulting superabundance of intellectual capital will end meaningful market competition. Entrepreneurs will no longer be relevant in the competitive market because an "entrepreneurial AI" can simply take their place. Some have speculated about the first billion-dollar single-person company. Could there be one with no people at all?

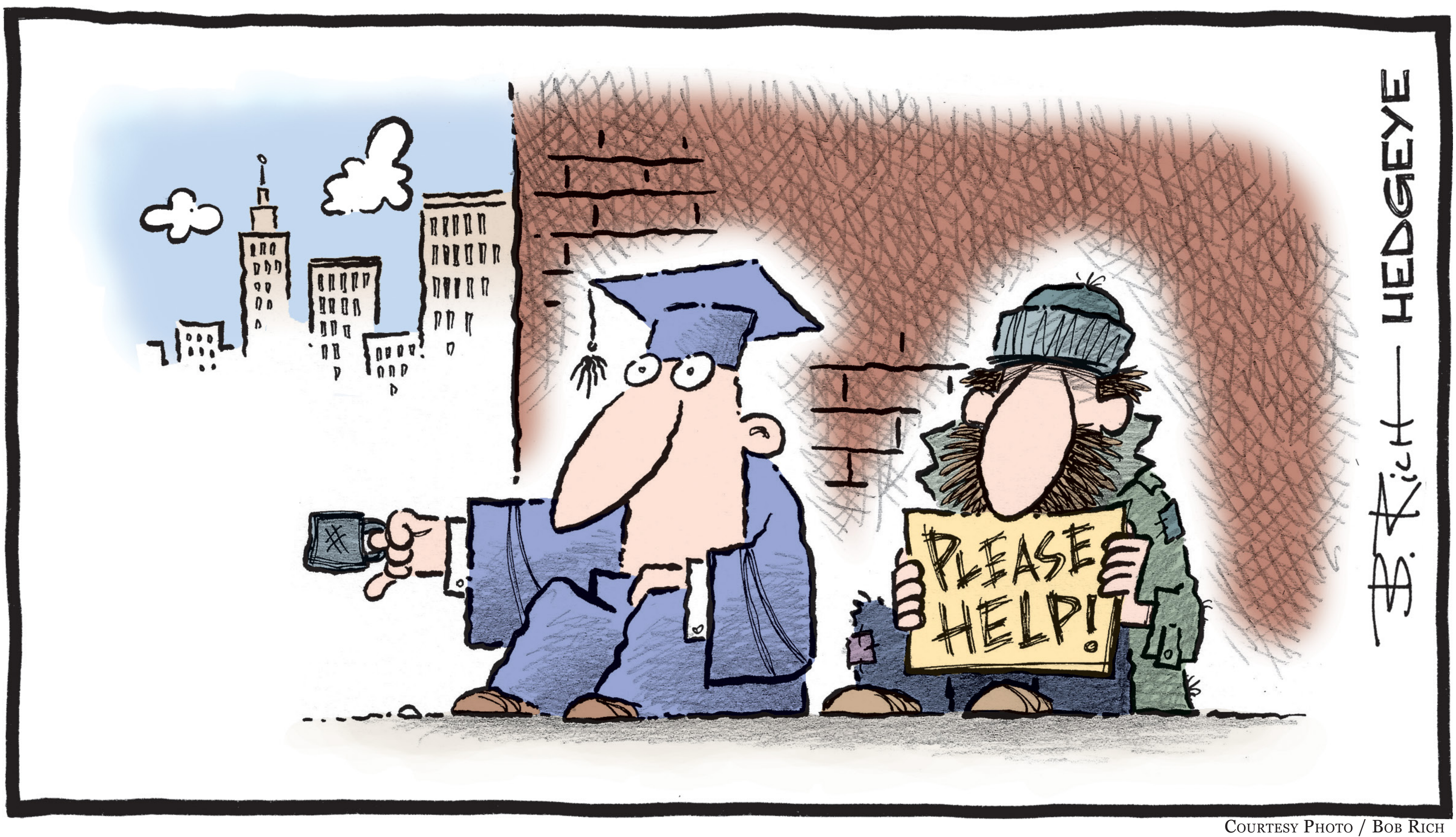
With this, the twilight of capitalism may finally ebb into night. Could Marx have ever predicted that the end of the capitalist system would not be brought about by humans, but by their sudden obsolescence in it? Perhaps this was the purpose of capitalism all along — to progress to the point where we could finally invent the new gods. Now we only wait to see if they will worship us or destroy us.

I should note that just because AI progress has been exponential does not mean it will continue to be. In fact, there are many who believe that, like most technology, AI progress is slowing in the manner of an S-curve. I can comfortably speak for the human race when I say we would much prefer this assumption.

But I assume the opposite; that AI progress is and will continue to be exponential, and so should you. The warm winds are subtle: The Trump administration recently invested a 10% stake in Intel. Nvidia, Intel's main competitor, bought an additional 5% stake. It's clear we're currently in an AI arms race, and we shouldn't be surprised when we find out the next Manhattan project has been long underway.

Do I honestly think the world will end here? The human race has a tendency to pull through, so no, we'll be fine. But given the nature of the technological advances that we are actively witnessing, we should expect some major corrections to our systems and institutions. In any case, this is certainly an exciting time to be alive.

I am always trying to refine my perspective: please email me with your thoughts at jdisorbo@middlebury.edu.



COURTESY PHOTO / BOB RICH

Cartoonist Bob Rich's take on the job markets and their relationship to the economy.

Emilo
Real Estate
173 Court Street, Middlebury, VT
Roxanna Emilo, Broker/Realtor/Owner
(802) 349-9837

Christine Fraioli, Realtor
(802) 989-2234

Office: (802) 388-4440
emilovtrealestate@gmail.com
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Letter to the Editor: International students deserve protection from their colleges

Op-Ed

Kimberly Barros *is a member of the class of 2028.*

Recently, the Trump administration has proposed a rule to limit the duration of F-1 student visas to four years, irrespective of the length of academic programs. This is an urgent call for all academic institutions to support their international students. We must reaffirm our commitment to them by urging university leadership to take concrete steps to protect their rights, well-being, and opportunities to succeed.

In the 2023–2024 academic year, international students contributed approximately $43.8 billion to the U.S. economy, supporting over 378,000 jobs. A potential decline in international student enrollment in the 2025–2026 academic year could result in nearly $7 billion in lost revenue and over 60,000 fewer jobs.

Beyond economic contributions, international students enrich U.S. communities by bringing diverse perspectives, improving multicultural understanding, and broadening our global awareness. I want to take this opportunity to thank Sen. Peter Welch and Sen. Bernie Sanders for continuously showing their public support for international communities in Vermont. I urge you to continue standing with us opposing harmful visa restrictions, by encouraging the Trump administration to pass a Presidential Determination that sets a higher cap for refugee admissions addressing the need for those whose approved status and flights were cancelled earlier this year.

YOU ARE HERE

SKILES ROBERTS-SALVADOR

ADDRESSING THE HOLE THE CLOSURE OF MIDDSAFE WILL LEAVE BEHIND

Editorial

The editorial represents the opinion of the Middlebury Campus Editorial Board.

When the Center for Health and Wellness (CHW) recently announced the termination of the MiddSafe Hotline and Mental Health Peer Educators (MPHE) program, it cited a lack of student use as the reason. They pointed to the increase in mental health resources in the CHW as having supplemented the need for the hotline. They announced that their new program, Peers Educating for Affirming Relations (PEAR), will absorb the responsibilities of both MiddSafe and MPHE.

While we are relieved to see an increase in accessibility of professional counseling and other mental health resources on campus, we are concerned about the loss of MiddSafe. We believe MiddSafe was unique in what it offered our community; a 24/7 hotline staffed by real students who were trained as certified rape crisis workers provided an invaluable service to Middlebury students. The MiddSafe advocates provided a selfless service, and in return, students could receive counseling from a peer who understands what it means to be a student at Middlebury. No one knows what it means to feel isolated at Middlebury better than students themselves. Access to confidential peer counseling is key to addressing issues of sexual assault, isolation and mental health crises.

While it seems unlikely, we hope that PEAR can fill some of the gap it will leave behind.

We also wonder if MiddSafe's decline in calls could be a result of frequent staff turnover and a lack of effective communication about MiddSafe itself. First year orientation is one of the only times students are required to learn about resources, such as MiddSafe, while attending Middlebury. With the many exciting and sometimes overwhelming feelings the first few days at college can bring, orientation is not the only time students should hear about resources directly.

Tactics the CHW could use to market their many resources include better promotion of events, not just the posting of flyers, but a greater social media presence from programs like PEAR, as well as student body-wide emails and events.

Engagement with resources like MiddSafe may have increased if administrators and professors made a broader effort to encourage student engagement with resources such as MiddSafe. Students should not have to choose between club events, meetings or athletics commitments to engage with mental health resources that could be the difference for a student in a crisis down the line.

To increase student engagement with mental health and safety resources on campus, we as students must also reframe the culture of who attends these events and why. You do not need to be interested in counseling, a resident assistant or a member of a CHW peer group to attend events that often provide free food, stickers, and sometimes even therapy dogs during finals week — if you go, you might find out about a resource that could help you or a struggling friend in the future.

We hope the sudden and disappointing closure of MiddSafe can be an opportunity for everyone in our community to reflect on the value of a peer-to-peer relationship when addressing mental health concerns or crises. We call on CHW to reinstate a crisis hotline with Middlebury students on the other end of the line as a part of PEAR. We also hope to see positive student engagement with these new resources in the future. For any student at Middlebury to experience a sense of belonging and place in their community, they must first experience a sense of safety.

Middlebury often feels like a safe haven, but we want students to remember that it is not. Staying educated and engaging with our community over matters of safety is essential to ensure we keep each other safe on our campus.

The Middlebury Campus
Susanna Schatz

Reheat the leftovers: My takeaway from studying Classical Chinese in Beijing

Op-Ed

Murray Helzer *is a member of the class of 2026.*

At Beijing Capital Normal University, where I took my semester abroad this past spring, I enrolled in Classical Chinese. There, I developed confidence and an interest in reading simple classical Chinese. I also became more familiar with major schools of thought in the Pre-Qin period of ancient China, its prominent thinkers and their influence on modern China. After studying Classical Chinese, I developed a deeper understanding of Confucius' saying:

"Reviewing the old enables one to know the new." This statement concisely summarizes the logic of thought that I have seen in many ancient Chinese scholars: They often revisited the ideas and events of the past to develop their own insights.

For example, in Inscription of the Humble Room (Lòu shì míng) and On the Love of the Lotus (Aì liǎn Shuō), the authors use historical figures or natural imagery to express their own aspirations and virtues. Inscription of the Humble Room is a kind of inscriptional prose, a literary form used to record the history or qualities of a place or thing. Liu Yuxi, its author, describes how although his dwelling is simple and crude, it reflects high moral character. At the end of the piece, he mentions Zhuge Liang's cottage in Nanyang and Yang Xiong's pavilion in Western Shu, comparing his own humble home to the modest abodes of these historical figures. In doing so, he stresses that although one's surroundings may be plain, one's virtue and talent can still match those of the Ancients. In modern society I was persuaded that a creative mixology of old and new culture interact and classical ideas serve as appendages for underlying psychology in modern society. The philosophy of the past, I found, provided footnotes for complicated social dynamics in the present.

> "Reviewing the old enables one to know the new."

My opinion is that one reason China remains open to new technology and creative solutions is because of the creative drawing from a vast index of previous thinkers. The early philosophies of China distill knowledge through describing foundational natural processes and interfacing with them based on their own unique context. I once discvussed the idiom "the fox borrows the tiger's might" with my roommate, and he shared a vivid example that highlighted power dynamics I was not aware of at the time.

> "When emotions are aroused, they should all be expressed in due measure."

When we went to a drone and camera shop outside of Shougang park (Beijing) together, he noticed that because I was a foreigner, the salesperson treated me with special enthusiasm and gave very detailed product explanations. After this experience, my roommate expressed to me laughingly that he "borrowed my prestige," and received better service as a result. I think this situation also reflects ideas from The Doctrine of the Mean (Zhōng yōng), an early Confucius text that describes a middle way for expressing oneself. One line that strvuck me is: "When emotions are aroused, they should all be expressed in due measure." In other words, one should not lean too far in any direction. In that experience, my roommate did not overuse my "foreign" advantage nor act forcefully, but instead found a balanced way to reach his goal. This illustrates exactly what the Doctrine of the Mean calls the "middle way."

In "On the Love of the Lotus," Zhou Dunyi conveys his ideal of moral character through his admiration of flowers. He writes that the lotus "emerges unstained from the mud, and remains pure when washed by clear water," symbolizing the gentleman's virtue — remaining untainted by vulgarity and steadfast in integrity. This metaphor shows how ancient thinkers often used the imagery of nature or the legacy of earlier figures to lead into reflections on contemporary life. Similarly, in Ouyang Xiu's "On Factions and in The Great Learning," we can also see that "self-cultivation" was the core goal of Confucian thought. Although different writers had their own interpretations of how to achieve this goal, they all drew upon history, metaphor, and earlier teachings to deepen their own arguments. This practice itself embodies the spirit of "reviewing the old to learn the new."

Through studying these classical works, I have realized that traditional Chinese thought is not merely a memory of the past; it continues to influence people's behavior and values today. To "review the old" is not only to revisit history but is also an important path to gaining new knowledge and inspiration in the present.

> "I have realized that traditional Chinese thought is not merely a memory of the past; it continues to influence people's behavior and values today."

Courtesy Photo/ Murray Helzer

Animal shaped candy formed after blowing into sugar at the Beijing lantern festival

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The Middlebury Campus

TAMPONS, TEARS, AND TOTEBAGS – SCENES FROM THE PERFORMA-MIDD MALE CONTEST

By DEVIN SANTIKARMA
Contributing Writer

Judith Butler is famous for writing that gender is a performance. What the renowned gender studies scholar did not write, though, is that gender can be more than a performance; it can also be a competition.

Labu-Butler quotes aside, the buzz around thea viral "performative male" contest coming to campus had been building for weeks — from cryptic posters for "feminist literature clubs" featuring Beabadoobee book covers to the clinking cacophony of carabiners as Crossroads baristas were flooded with matcha orders at exactly 3:15 p.m. last Friday.

As I approach the competition with my camera, skateboard, and wired headphones (I'm 6'5", by the way), I'm struck by the variety of interpretations of performative male-ness on display. A guitar-slinging duo serenades a crowd with Hozier. Another pair makes a nonchalant entrance, both nose-deep in books, asking, "Wait, is there some kind of event happening or something?" Nearby, a man — not even a contestant — cradles a cat and offers free pets.

This TikTok trend brought to life on the lawn of McCullough was the vision of Chidinma Ike '27, a biochemistry major and Black studies minor.

"It started out as a joke, really," she toldtells me. "I'm always the planner friend, organizing friends' birthdays and stuff. I just said to myself, I'm gonna do it. I thought it would be fun, light-hearted, and not that deep."

Ike stayed anonymous until the day of the competition, promoting the event through the Instagram account @ middperformativemale.

"Keeping it anonymous created a funnier environment and some suspense — like, who is this person?" she explaineds. "I didn't want it to just be my close friends or people who know me. Still, my friends were really supportive. They knew it was funny and unserious."

Elliot Dufeu '28, a contestant, shareds the same light-hearted spirit. "I feel like sometimes Middlebury lacks the energy for something spontaneous and fun. I saw other schools doing it, and it looked like a lot of fun,." Dufeu said.

Tony '28 made a last-minute decision to join after being urged by friends.

"When they told me, I was shook they thought a person like me would be the perfect contestant. But now I feel like they were right — I belong here."

The crowd swells as contestants take turns waxing poetic, presenting their performance-enhancing objects, and answering questions from Ike and the audience. Their hatred for periods draws thunderous applause.

"Oh my gosh, it was complete chaos," Ike laugheds. "Half those questions I pulled from thin air. I was pretending to be on my phone — it was a blank screen. Total go-with-the-flow. I kept thinking to myself, this is so funny, I'm gonna keep going."

When I asked if anything could have gone differently, Ike reflecteds: "Even though it's a performative male contest, I did say all genders were welcome. I was hoping for more non-men to show up, but it's okay."

Her one regret? Not making it a pregame with a party afterward: "People dressing as performative males, a DJ spinning Clairo/Sexxy Red remixes — that would've been perfect."

The winners didn't go home empty-handed. First place received Clairo CDs; second place, Dunkin' gift cards. They then vanished over Chapel Hill like tiny specks of dust, baggy jeans flapping in the wind.

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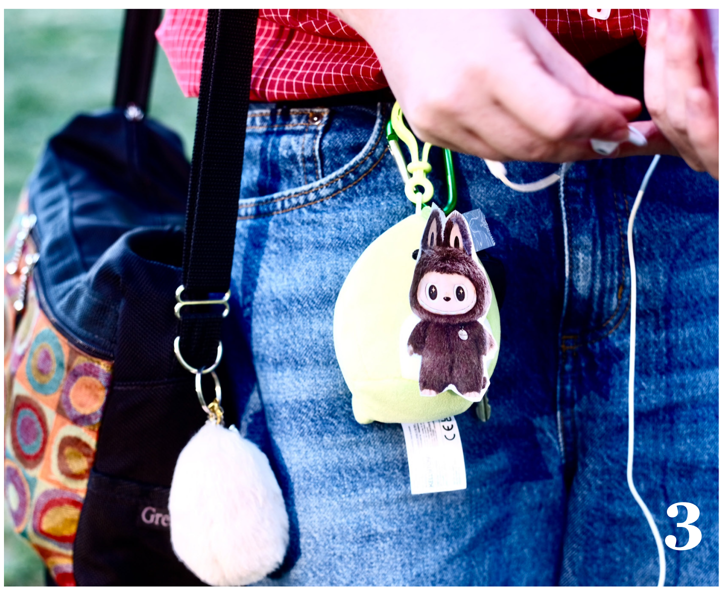
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Courtesy Photos/Devin Santikarma

1. Some performative male contestants.
2.River Costello (front) '27.
3. Ariana Troutman '27.
4. Angeline Rivera '29.
5. Elliot Dufeu '28.
6. (From left to right) Sathvik Kunigal '28 and Victor Corte '28.
7. A contestant speaking to the crowd.
8. The contest happened this past Friday on McCullough Lawn.

WEDNESDAY’S SIXTH STUDIO ALBUM “BLEEDS” OOZES WITH REFLECTION

By GUS MORRILL
Arts & Culture Editor

Four months after the release of “Rat Saw God”, their “lightning bolt of a fifth album” as described by Pitchfork Magazine, alternative-rock band Wednesday released a mini documentary called “Rat Bastards of Haw Creek.” Shot by filmmaker and friend of the band Zach Romeo, the documentary feels casual, showing everything from the mundane parts of the band’s life to their frenetic local shows. There are attempts at fishing, talk of root vegetables, chess games on a front porch and sewing projects that will eventually end up in the hands of fans. This is a snapshot in time for Wednesday on theproperty folded into the Blue Ridge mountains called Haw Creek, where most of the band’s music is recorded. Later that year the land would be sold, signaling a quiet but tectonic shift for the band.

Similarly tectonic was the release of Wednesday guitarist MJ Lenderman’s solo album “Manning Fireworks” and the artist’s breakup with Wednesday frontwoman Karly Hartzman. Things had changed. MJ Lenderman would no longer tour with the band, and the band’s home base since their inception had been bought up by contractors. Wednesday stayed together, but some of the key ingredients of its identity had been changed.

However, when the band’s sixth project “Bleeds” released this past Friday (Sept. 19), any question of their consistency was put to rest. Wednesday has always walked the line between Appalachian stylings and shoegaze, noise and twang.The opening track “Reality TV Argument Bleeds”, however, is full of noise, as walls of sound surround Hartzman’s recollections. “Townies” leans in the opposite direction, musing on returns to the sameness of one’s hometown. This makes sense for Wednesday; regardless of tours around the world, they remain very much from Asheville, North Carolina and from the hemlocks and maples of Haw Creek. The track “Gary’s” off of “Twin Plagues” and its sequel “Gary’s II” on “Bleeds” are not elaborate rock ballads as much as stories about an old friend (in this case the landlord of Haw Creek).

Limiting Wednesday’s “fromness” to just the Blue Ridge Mountains, woods and creeks however, is a disservice to the band. They are also shaped by the chipped teeth, dissassociation, “squirrel-killers”, and fights with biker gangs. “Pick Up That Knife” is layered with this sense of malaise, describing a feeling of being stuck within places and communities that resist change. The noisiest track on the album, “Wasp”, carries its pessimistic lyrics with screamo vocals: “I’m sick, can’t fuck, push the paint around / Castrated in my mental death / God’s plan / Unfolds / So slow”.

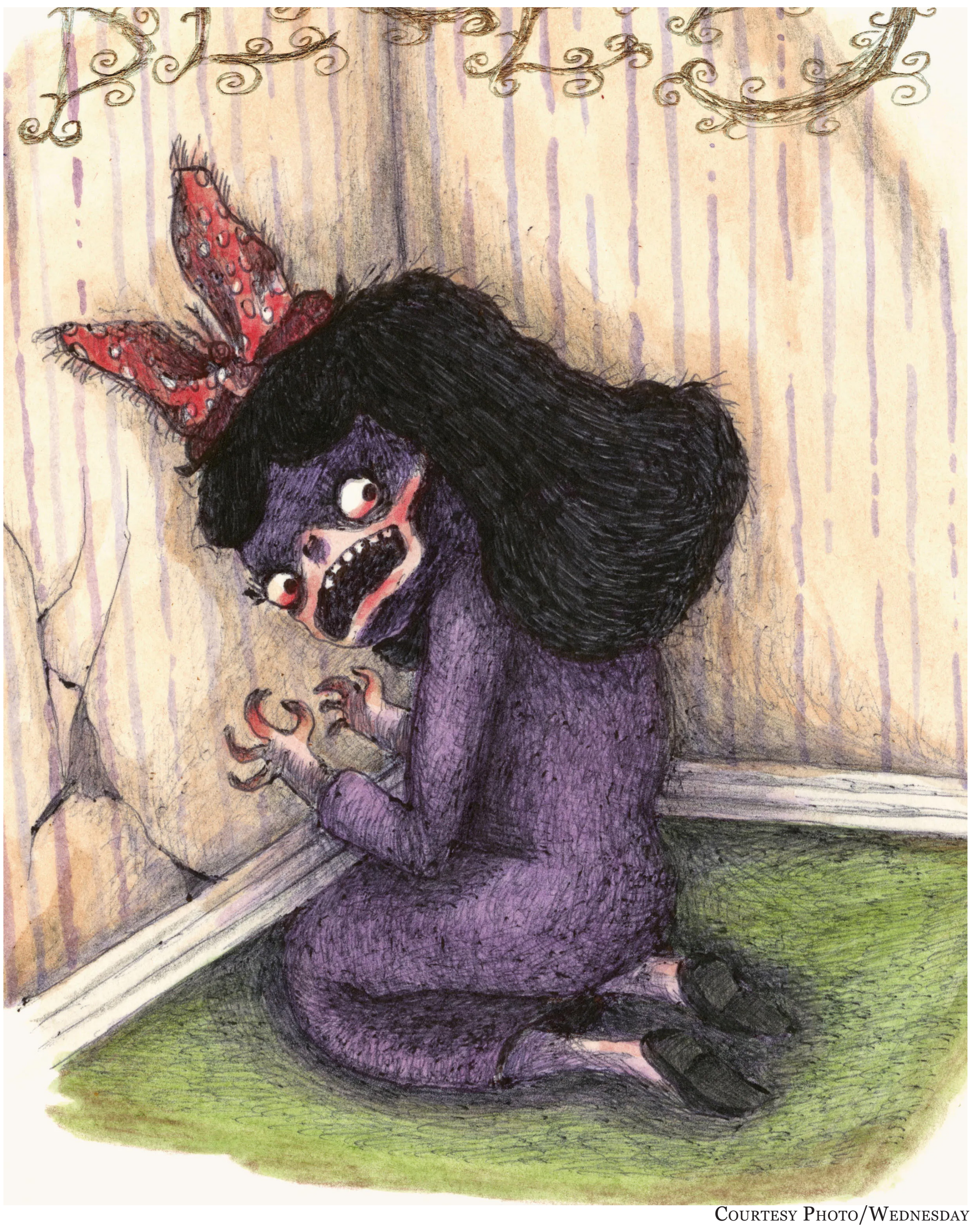
“Bitter Everyday” is more melodic but details all the same talks of the decline in the things that the band once held to be untouchable. Life as the band knew it is not, and will not be, the same as it was, and it is a hard pill to swallow.

Yet many of the songs come as badges of survival against these conditions. My personal favorite off the album, “Wound Up Here by Holding On”, draws from a friend’s book of poetry, painting stills of shithead exploits that are simultaneously withstood and cherished. Indeed, Hartzman sources her lyrics from several worlds: these exploits, literary references, video game franchise “Mortal Kombat”, conversations and old television series. Sometimes these songs are about one specific story, other times theyfocus on creating an image of a moment in time.

The album’s debut single “Elderberry Wine” is celebratory, like sitting on camping chairs in a wooded area, while “Candy Breath” is a fun song that feels akin to jumping off a fraying rope swing into murky green water.

The most poignant image in the album, however, is the one found in the song “The Way Love Goes”. The track was written during Lenderman’s and Hartzman’s relationship, and details the imperfections yet constancy of their love. It is a time capsule, with lamenting lyrics and soft vocals, and this album is a testament to their mutual appreciation for each other, even now.

On their label’s promotional page for “Bleeds”, Hartzman is quoted saying “Bleeds is the spiritual successor to Rat Saw God”. However, this moniker doesn’t feel right. Sure it is as “countrygazey” as the band’s previous project, and is set in a lot of the same places. But this album feels both more fraught and more characteristic of the band. Perhaps it is because the band’s ethos is not focused on the wide acclaim that they now receive nor the consistently far reaching locales on their tour list. It is instead discomfort, frustration at not having things figured out, nostalgia and a deep appreciation for what is right in front of them. In this way, this album being a product of right now and all the time leading up to it makes it the band’s best yet. A project coming from the third day of the week, but necessitating a listen all seven. Days that is.


Courtesy Photo/Wednesday

The album cover from Wednesday’s latest album “Bleeds.”

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MY COLLEGE DIARY

By CHRISTY LIANG
Arts and Culture Editor

"You are a writer. Don't tell your parents that." My English advisor, Professor Robert Cohen, told me these words as I sat in his office, talking about my recent turn towards Buddhist thought and how I've unclouded my judgment of the outside world over the summer.

Before college, I knew with an unshakable certainty that I wanted to be a writer. I'd browse through all the creative writing classes and imagine myself in them, enthralled and radiant with enthusiasm. All I wanted to do was turn my wayward feelings and swirling thoughts into words, to press permanence on what is bound to pass. Writing — both personal essays and short stories — always brought me immense joy and helped me establish in clearer, richer terms who I am and who I'd like to be.

After a couple of lukewarm creative writing workshops at college, however, I found myself drifting away from the idea of writing as a career, or rather, writing as something that can be taught in an academic setting. Words have always come to me from deeply intimate corners of my selfhood, on their own accord or prompted by my overpowering disposition of inward searching. I love the way sentences unfurl like a stream from an unnameable, yet visceral center within me. In brief moments, as I write, the interior and the exterior coalescence. It is quite magical. I feel imbued with an aliveness akin to the feeling of a really good conversation, a long, meditative walk or running through the woods as the sun's about to set.

Then I realized that writing is a deeply personal act to me. That it matters the most when I feel compelled to write, not towards an audience or to fulfill an academic task, but because my innate striving for meaning distilled from lived experience brings me back to the page, again and again. As a result, I thought I'd start journaling.

In late August, I stumbled upon Tao Lin's My College Diary published in The Paris Review and had an absolute blast reading it. I found it so real, unfiltered, full of laughs and the poignancy of growing up. It captured the chaotic yet ultimately aestheticized tenor of college life so well that I immediately thought of doing something similar.

For the longest time, I was skeptical about keeping a diary. I thought I'd feel stifled by the banality of writing down what happened, what I ate, or whom I talked to. But Tao Lin showed me something different, that a diary tracks the psychological undertones of your ever-shifting existence, that it could be terribly refreshing to look back on an entry a month, a year, or even a decade ago and think: "Wow that's how I was feeling." I also thought about how these documentations of day-to-day happenings, moods and reflections may inspire future creative projects.

So, I started journaling and keeping a digital diary simultaneously. I've found it to be a deeply centering and affirming act, one that reminds me I can always take root in my interiority, which is, in fact, infinite. To my pleasant surprise, I've also found that in these highly personal mediums, my language acquires a special lightness. Unburdened by academic jargon and any intention to impress, I write almost lyrically, with phrases running around like little rabbits on the field. The line between prose and poem often gets straddled; past, present and future converse with one another. Most importantly, what induces fear, anxiety, or sadness becomes invariably tamed after getting channeled out.

Nothing lasts, after all. We're just taking a seat in a theatre, watching as experiences happen to us.

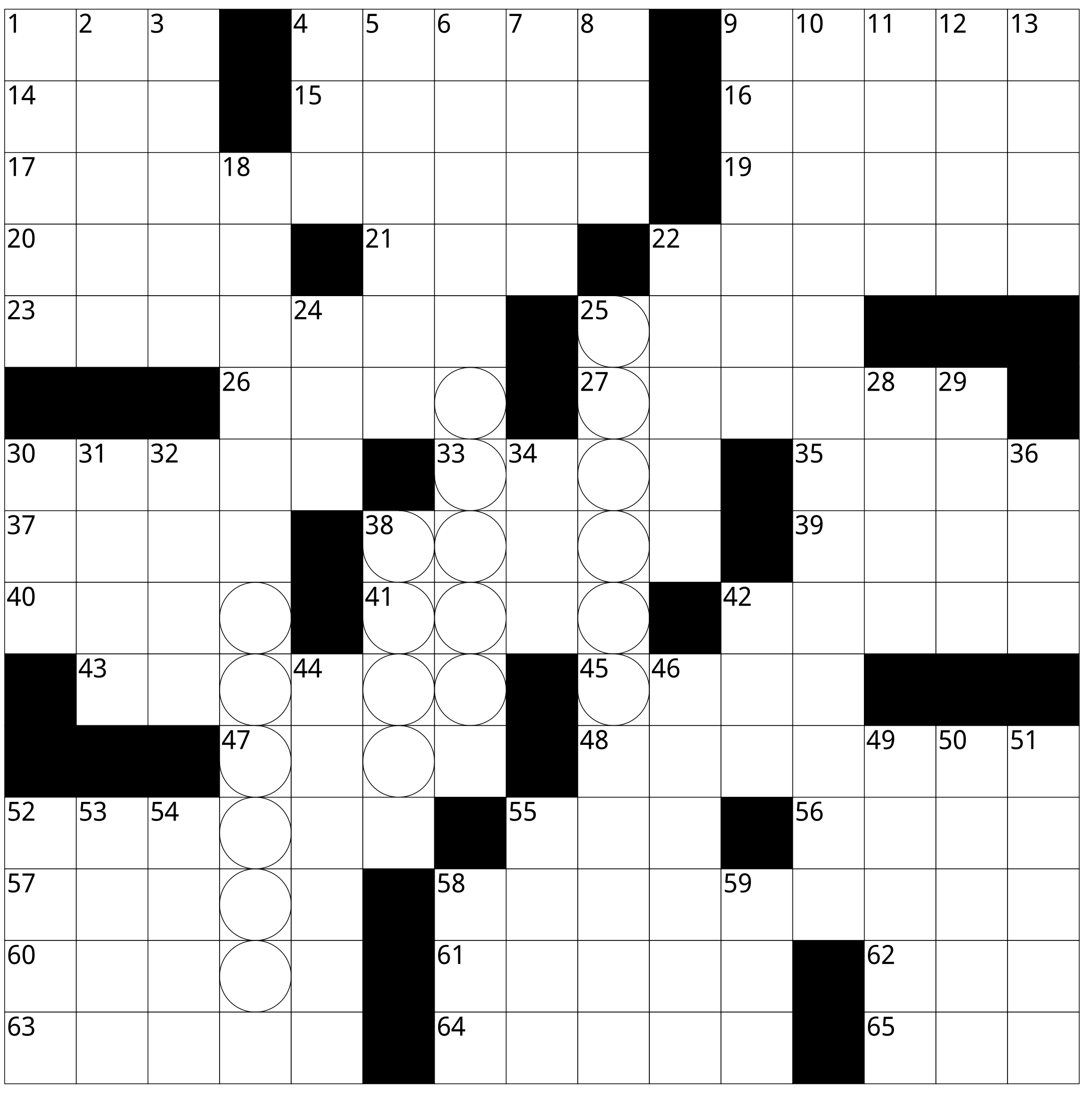
CHRISTY LIANG / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

A couple nights ago, I wrote in my journal: "I feel like a thing, a lovely, shifting thing held all around by a porous membrane, floating soundlessly through the theatre of life filled with giggles, sparks of insight, and love ripening through avenues imaginable and beyond."

May we all be seen and held by something larger, something gentle, something deeply within.

Going Down Fast

Avery Goldstein



ACROSS

1 Easy as ___
4 Hostess snack cakes
9 A cube has 12
14 ___-la-la
15 Face with tears of joy, for one
16 Bakery emanation
17 Container with hooks and worms
19 Sega hedgehog
20 Analogy words
21 Units of wt.
22 Outcasts
23 Santa's entrance
25 "The End of Nature" author, McKibben
26 Vow
27 Benefit
30 What beats a heart?
33 "Simpsons" bus driver with a palindromic name
35 Seaweed
37 Toblerone's includes a bear hidden in a mountain
38 Places for pledges
39 Stone or Watson
40 Extension or umbilical follower
41 Cruise stop
42 Underway
43 Zimbabwe's capital
45 Toss of the dice
47 Matures
48 Ocean Spray nibble
52 "All that glitters is not gold" and others
55 Before, poetically
56 Sicilian spewer
57 Symbolic food to bring home
58 Writes letter by letter
60 Change, as the Constitution
61 Rental contract
62 Women's soccer powerhouse
63 Actress Thompson of "Creed"
64 Oman neighbor
65 ___ Aviv

DOWN

1 Loft
2 Brazen
3 Prickly plants
4 Underworld goddess
5 Brunch staple
6 Play ponies
7 Eyes, in Buenos Aires
8 Number of suspects in Clue
9 Stands in a studio
10 Collapse en masse, or a description of the circled words in 6,18, 25, and 38 down
11 Missing
12 Mideast ruler
13 Pouches
18 World's largest lizards
22 Weight loss surgeries, informally
24 When doubled, a 2010s dance fad
25 Cupcake frosting choice
28 Floor model
29 Red Muppet
30 Utah's capital, for short
31 Pal of Piglet
32 Taj Mahal locale
34 "Que ___?" ("What's up?")
36 Touch gently
38 Gives the pink slip
42 In the style of
44 Meeting plan
46 Ultimatum words
49 Guinness, e.g.
50 Occupied
51 Birth-related
52 Blind as ___
53 Notre ___
54 2022 WNBA champs
55 Fencing sword
58 Cunning
59 "Dancing With the Stars" judge Goodman

WOMEN’S SOCCER EARNS GRITTY DRAW AGAINST AMHERST

By LILLIAN TRACY
Contributing Editor

COURTESY PHOTO / WILL COSTELLO

The women’s soccer team celebrates a goal in their win against Union College earlier last week.

The Middlebury women’s soccer team fought to a hard-earned 0-0 draw against Amherst this past Saturday, Sept. 20, shutting down one of the NESCAC’s most potent attacks. Amherst peppered the goal, but the Panthers’ back line, anchored by a standout performance from senior goalkeeper and captain, Livia Davidson ’26, held firm, making an impressive defensive statement.

Throughout the game, Davidson scooped up corners and shut down Mammoth breakaways with the composure of a seasoned player. Yet for her, the battle was as much a mental as it was physical.

“I was constantly forcing every other thought out of my head, I heard myself saying out loud, ‘lock in, lock in,’” Davidson said.

That laser focus paid off, and her teammates commended her tenacity in their post-game reflections.

“Liv killed it,” midfielder Olivia Irwin-Pokorny ’26.5 said. “She’s had a long battle with injury, and then stepped up this year as a captain. Seeing her really step up when we needed her was remarkable.”

Wingback Mari Rode ’29 agreed. “There were a few times where I was like, ‘she’s going to score,’ and then somehow Liv — she just had very sticky hands every time the ball came to her.”

It wasn’t just Davidson, though. The Panthers’ entire defense knocked Amherst out of rhythm and into a frustrating grind that lasted the entire game. Rode, whose agility and anticipation stood out in high pressure moments, described her defensive mindset.

“All I was thinking was, I need to get back, I need to get goalside before they cross in,” she said.

> “All I was thinking was, I need to get back, I need to get goalside before they cross in.”

Defender Wynne Braemer ’29 was on the same page. “Our main key in the back was just trying to keep a really strong wall, and I think we succeeded.”

Yet what made the afternoon special wasn’t just the on-field resilience, but the culture that fueled it. From the relentless “benergies” (bench-energies) to the behind-the-scenes pregame chaos, the team’s chemistry was on full display.

“We get so hype in the locker room,” first year keeper Aubrey Silvestri ’29 said. “Like so, so hype. We just scream songs.”

Defender Ainsley Chu ’29 echoed this spirit: “Soccer is about little moments, and I think our energy on and off the field pushes people further.”

> “Soccer is about little moments, and I think our energy on and off the field pushes people further.”

This energy also allowed for a cohesive on-field presence for the Panthers. “I never felt like it was one person on that field. Everyone had each other’s backs,” Braemer said. “The fans felt it, too. Alumni, parents, and friends filled the sidelines, creating a noisy, supportive atmosphere that blurred the line between past and present.”

For Irwin-Pokorny, team spirit also involves recognizing the grind behind the scenes.

“Everyone’s working so hard over the summer, in practice, through injuries, balancing school. It’s immense. People spend a lot of time being really stressed because it is just an added pressure. But everyone is working really really hard,” she said.

The game ended scoreless, but hardly empty. For the Panthers, it was a benchmark — proof they can hold their own against Amherst while revealing what still needs sharpening.

“We have the technique, it’s just about focus,” Davidson concluded.

If Saturday was any indication, this team has plenty of both.

MIDDLEBURY FIELD HOCKEY WINS OVERTIME THRILLER AGAINST AMHERST

By HANNA FREUND
Contributing Writer

COURTESY PHOTO/COLIN BOURQUE

Megan Fuqua ‘27 shoots for Middlebury against Amherst.

The Middlebury field hockey team is no stranger to pressure or high expectations. As seven-time consecutive national champions, the Panthers carry a reputation built on records, championship titles, and all-American talent.

At Middlebury, it seems to be an assumption that the team will win any given game. And for good reason — the Panthers boasted a 43 game win streak starting in 2022. While the streak ended in 2024, the team still clinched the national title that season, proving their dominance and consistency.

This season has brought unusual challenges. Prior to this season, Middlebury field hockey had not entered overtime in a single game since their 1–0 NCAA Championship victory over Johns Hopkins in 2022. Yet this year the Panthers have gone past regulation three times – against Hamilton, Trinity and now Amherst.

“We have come away with a win after all three overtime games this season. I think that speaks a lot to our team’s determination and grit and how hard we work even after playing a whole 60 minutes,” defender Ally Kennedy ’27 said.

In the team’s meeting with Amherst on Saturday, the Mammoths took the lead first, but the Panthers tied by the third quarter.

Amherst pulled ahead again in the fourth. Middlebury’s players responded with heightened urgency and aggression, battling the clock and trying to close Amherst’s one point lead.

With less than two minutes left in regulation play, head coach Katherine DeLorenzo pulled the starting goalie Izzy Redzic ’27 to put on an extra attacker.

With an additional player and unmatched determination, the Panthers earned multiple consecutive penalty corners, slowed down the clock, and created favorable scoring opportunities.

With under 20 seconds on the clock, Sarah Bona ’26 launched the ball into the shooting circle, finding Tessa Herbst ’28. Herbst fired a shot that ricocheted to the right off the Mammoth’s goalie, exactly where captain Grace Keefe ’26 was strategically waiting. With only 2.4 seconds remaining on the scoreboard, Keefe snuck in a low angle shot to send the game into overtime.

“It was so amazing to feel the confidence and trust that we all had in each other,” starting midfielder Megan Fuqua ’27 said. “We had such great energy after scoring with two seconds left in regulation, and it was so cool to see so many players step up and get excited about playing overtime on our home field. Being a part of that environment was so special.”

With seven instead of 11 players taking the field from each team during overtime, the Panthers hustled to every ball and moved with purpose. Eight minutes into extra play the Panthers finished what they started during yet another penalty corner. Under pressure, Claire McMichael ’27 scored her first goal this season, tipping in the ball from just beyond the left post. After a brief video review by the referees, the Panthers were cleared to celebrate their 18th-straight victory against Amherst.

“Our team scoring the tying and then winning goals were moments in my career that I will never forget,” Kennedy said. “We can’t wait to get back to practice to build on what we learned in this weekend’s game, heading into a three game week.”

While not the easy victory that many have grown accustomed to seeing from this decorated squad, the hard-fought win makes it even sweeter for the Panthers.

Wins such as these highlight Middlebury’s dominance on the NESCAC and national field hockey stage, positioning them for further success as their season progresses.

COURTESY PHOTO/COLIN BOURQUE

TAPPED-IN: ROLLER SKIING

Deer Meadow Dr.

COURTESY PHOTO / SHEA BRAMS

Middlebury's varsity Nordic skiers tackle Brandon Gap.

By SIMON SCHMIEDER
Senior Sports Editor

Foliage radiating across the mountains beyond the soccer pitch, large swaths of the football team squeezed into the film room and packs of cross country runners circling the glass fields into dusk are a few of the familiar fall sports sights at Middlebury. Yet none of these are as attention-grabbing, nor as fluorescent, as the college's Nordic skiers zipping along the shoulder of South Main Street and through the town's surrounding countryside in their neon gear. The bright garments, single-file procession and rhythmic clacking of ski poles on pavement all comprise the ritual that is roller skiing.

In this inaugural issue of Tapped-in, I talked with a few of Middlebury's Nordic athletes to get an insider's perspective on what's really going on.

At its core, roller skiing is an important form of off-season training for Middlebury's varsity and club Nordic skiers. The training method, although not a perfect copy, sufficiently mimics the motions and demands of true Nordic skiing more closely than any other off-season workout.

"If you're wanting to get better at cross country skiing, roller skiing in the offseason is the one thing that is the closest you can get to on-snow skiing in the movements and the muscle groups," cross country skier for the college's varsity team Mason Wheeler '26 said.

Athletes even use the same boots as they would on regular skis, an additional benefit that Club Nordic skier Halle Zuck '26 pointed out. The relative shortness of roller skis allows for more sharper turns and handling drills.

"Because the skis are so short, you can train really intense agility," Co-President of Club Nordic Caio Brown '26 said.

However, roller skiing has its downsides. First, the subtle differences in hip and knee alignment between pavement and snow can cause injuries when skiers adjust between surfaces. Classic roller skis also sport a ratcheted wheel design, meaning that any backwards force will help propel a skier forward. In contrast to the narrow wax pocket beneath true classic skis that grips the snow and creates the necessary friction for movement, this difference can encourage bad skiing form habits.

> "Because the skis are so short, you can train really intense agility."

These drawbacks are minor, though, compared to the glaring question of safety.

Admittedly, watching people roller ski is nerve-wracking. Between the two slabs of metal gliding beneath each foot, two poles prancing on each flank, and up to a dozen athletes skiing in close succession, there are many moving parts that are apt to collide. The potentially fatal presence of cars only heightens the risk. All the skiers I spoke with confirmed these concerns.

"Even now after years of doing it, I probably have at least one good crash a year at the minimum," Wheeler said.

Yet the visible dangers present in roller skiing may not even constitute the single biggest risk of the sport — that prize is likely won by pebbles.

> "Even now after years of doing it, I probably have at least one good crash a year at the minimum."

"The gap between the wheel and the ski, especially on skate skis, is like a centimeter, and if your wheel sucks up a pebble that's about a centimeter or a little bigger, it can actually just stop the entire wheel," Wheeler said.

"I have the intrusive thought of if I hit a little rock, I'm cooked," Brams said.

Cooked, indeed. A stray pebble could trigger full ejection, not ideal when you are flying down a paved road, reaching speeds of 40 miles per hour, wearing little more than a t-shirt and shorts. Road rash is common proof for such incidents; incidents of torn menisci and broken bones are some of the more serious results from the union of skin and asphalt.

> "I have the intrusive thought of if I hit a little rock, I'm cooked."

Pebble anxiety aside, just stopping on roller skis is dangerous enough.

The skis rarely come with brakes, and if they are included, trying to tinker with speed reducing systems while moving may cause a crash of its own. The common method of slowing down, then, involves lots of planning ahead, knowledge of the terrain, and the classic "pizza" technique: An awkward pointing in of the toes combined with a series of inwards steps until you reach a gradual halt.

If an instant stop is necessary, there is always a last resort. "For us, the closest to an emergency brake is you bail into the grass on the side if that's an option," Brown said.

So, is it worth it? The skiers I spoke with gave a resounding "Yes."

In light of the risks, both teams follow strict safety protocols and road etiquette: Always wearing high-visibility gear and helmets, skiing single-file and alerting fellow skiers when traffic is approaching. Further, local drivers tend to be accommodating of roller skiers according to Brams and Wheeler.

The dangers of the road can even be removed by trekking to one of the region's two enclosed roller skiing tracks, or if you're lucky enough to find one, using a giant treadmill specifically designed for roller skiing. Generally, though, Middlebury's Nordic skiers stick to the roads. Given the exhilarating terrain and stunning surroundings of the college, you might do the same if you were in their boots.

COURTESY PHOTO / SHEA BRAMS

Club Nordic skiers sporting the signature bright colors.